

It's All About Location: YA Literature Locations and Availability to Teens

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

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## Abstract

Young Adult literature is a newer genre that is slowly gaining traction with teenagers and adults. It is a genre that is marketed directly to teens to show them that they are not alone in their experiences. However, this genre is not always readily available to teenagers. I analyze three different types of places in Fort Wayne, Indiana, where teens may look for Young Adult books: libraries, large retailers, and bookstores. Each place was analyzed for its use of displays in or around the section, placement within the location, size of Young Adult collection, and variety of books for readers to choose.

## Acknowledgements

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With the rise in standardized testing across the nation, schools are continually trying to improve scores in tested subjects like English. One way schools attempt to raise scores is by implementing Accelerated Reader programs to get students reading. Students choose books from the school library to read and test on. However, this is more detrimental to reading than it is helpful. Kelly Gallagher's book *Readicide* shows how schools are actually killing reading for students rather than turning students into readers. He quotes a study by the National Assessment of Educational Progress that says that "secondary school students are reading significantly below expected levels" and a *USA Today* report that stated "27 percent of adults in this country did not read a single book in 2007" (2-3). This is a problem he proposes can be solved in schools, even though the problem begins there.

Donalyn Miller's *The Book Whisperer* demonstrates how she revolutionized reading in her English classes. Instead of focusing on test preparations or reading quizzes, she centered her classroom instruction on getting her students to read as much as possible. She states that, "Consuming a literary diet built exclusively on the classics does not provide students with the opportunity to investigate their own personal tastes in reading material and narrows their perspective of reading to the school task of hyper-analyzing literature" (124). Students who have not been exposed to pleasure reading may not know that reading can be a form of escapism or enjoyment rather than for analysis only.

Study after study, poll after poll has shown that adults are not reading as much as they probably should. An Associated Press poll in the *Washington Post* in 2007 shows "the average adult American read only four books that entire year...of

adults who read, their average was seven books, but 25 percent of the respondents did not read a book at all" (Miller 106-107). A study called *Reading at Risk* showed 54% of adults considered themselves nonliterary readers and only 16% as frequent or avid readers (Gallagher 3). Preservice teachers were asked about reading by Anthony and Mary Applegate, who reported "54.3 percent were unenthusiastic about reading" (Miller 107). Is it any wonder that students do not enjoy reading when the majority of adults do not see themselves as readers?

"Embracing their inner reader starts with students selecting their own books to read," Miller states. "Readers without power to make their own choices are unmotivated" (23). Teens should be encouraged to find books that interest them, whether these are realistic fiction, fantasy, or science fiction novels. It is therefore important to look at what books are being marketed to teenagers because these are the books they will likely choose to read on their own. Young Adult (YA) literature is a growing genre of books. This genre may also be referred to as teen literature or young adolescent literature.

The emphasis in schools is to raise test scores while hoping they create readers in the process. Some schools implement a version of silent reading time, which usually allows students to have a certain amount of freedom when it comes to choosing reading materials. This is because this time is devoted to getting students reading, regardless of whether the book is *A Tale of Two Cities* or *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. To do that, students need books available to them that interest them. Some kids will go to the school library to look for books, but some will go



elsewhere on their own time. Public libraries, bookstores, online resources, and large retailers are some of the places students may visit when looking for books.

My interest in YA literature stems from when I was a teenager. YA books were about characters my age who went on exciting journeys, discovered themselves along the way, and found some great friends who would always stand by them. It became my passion, and I eventually started a blog in college where I read and review YA books. Authors now contact me to give me free copies of their books in exchange for a review. While online resources like my blog are fantastic ways for students to find books to read, I became curious about how easy it would be for them to find books in a city.

### **Young Adult Literature: Genre History**

YA literature has a long history, but it has only just recently gained the footing it needed to be taken seriously. Alleen Pace Nilsen, et al. define young adult literature as “anything that readers the approximate ages of twelve and eighteen choose to read either for leisure reading or to fill school assignments” (3). This is by no means the only definition. In fact, it limits itself by being so precise. Cat Yampbell asks, “Does YA need to encompass the ages of 12-18? 13-19? 12-25? 14 and up?” (350). Melanie D. Koss and William H. Teale define YA as “ages 13-19” (563). Gail Zdilla notes, “YA [Literature] seems to be most often defined by adults for their specific purposes” (194). YA literature is, essentially, “a transition from children’s literature into the world of adult literature” (Zdilla 195). Adolescence itself is a transition between childhood and adulthood. Teenagers can use YA books, which contain adolescent characters, to understand this transition and grow.

However, teens sometimes do not even know these books even exist or, when they find them, which ones they should read. “Motivated by pressure from peers, parents, and educators, children who read will move directly from Young Readers to Adult Literature, completely bypassing most, if not all, of the Young Adult novels” Yampbell notes (350). This persistent problem undoubtedly affects how YA literature is presented to teenagers.

There is a lot of resistance from different groups about YA books because they tend to cover topics that adults think are too sensitive for teenagers to read about. Judy Blume’s *Forever* “caused a scandal in 1975” because of its portrayal of teen love and pregnancy (Yampbell 350). YA lit has continued since then to be about real problems that teens are facing. “Young Adult Literature has broken nearly every boundary of acceptable subject matter in trying to address real-life problems and intrigue teen readers,” Yampbell says (351). YA books do cover a wide range of dark topics, from self-harm and suicide to cancer and death of a friend or family member. Rachel Stark, an assistant marketing manager at Simon & Schuster Children’s Books, comments on the alarming trend of dead girls on the covers of YA books that may help to “glamorize violence against women” (“Cover Trends”). This darkness worries parents, who do not want their children to read books with violence, domestic abuse, and drug use to name a few.

However, others feel that this dark reputation is also somewhat unfounded. Sharyn November of Puffin and Viking Children’s Books says, “Gatekeepers often underestimate what teens can handle. [Teens] know a lot. They self-censor what they read—they skip over what they don’t understand and focus on what makes

sense to them at that point in their lives” (qtd. in Yambell 351). November is essentially saying that the resistance and backlash to YA lit is often unnecessary because teens will not read what does not apply to their experiences. In Koss and Teale’s analysis of topics covered in contemporary young adult literature, they noted, “sex and alcohol/drug use were not highly represented” in the books they examined (568). This suggests that perhaps the reputation YA literature has garnered is partially undeserved. Stark has a theory that these dark books may “provide a sense of catharsis, allowing teens to explore the dark things they imagine doing without actually having to participate in self-destructive acts” (“Cover Trends”). Teens could use YA books as a form of role-playing in order to understand the choices and consequences they are facing.

The YA genre contains more than problem novels about real teen struggles. YA literature is just as expansive as adult literature, going from science fiction and dystopias to historical and realistic fiction. Nilsen shows that from 2000-2009, the top three genres for YA books were realistic fiction (49%), historical (16%), and fantasy (10%) (19). Koss and Teale conducted a similar study, but with slightly different results. For books published between 1999 and 2005, they found the top three genres to be realistic fiction (47%), fantasy (12%), and historical fiction (7%) (566). These two studies show that the overwhelming majority of books are still about real problems that teens are facing every day. The current trend is also toward series books, as Nilsen notes by stating, “series books now have a new kind of prestige” (37). The implications of this are wide, but perhaps the most important is that a good series will have young readers returning time and again for the next

installment. This will keep readers coming back for more books by that author and may keep them looking through similar books in the same section.

## **Marketing of YA Literature**

With this basic understanding of YA literature and its history, the next step is to look at where students can find these books. Nilsen provides information on the publishing of books for young readers by saying “nearly five thousand [books are published yearly], with about one-fourth of them aimed at teenagers” (5). By these numbers, we can safely say that over one thousand books are being published annually for teenagers.

As previously mentioned, there are a wide variety of places a student can go to look for books, from a school library to an online resource. “Most public libraries have young adult sections,” Nilsen observes (320). While this is not the same as a school library, public libraries are usually just as accessible to students. Even better, “there are more public libraries in the United States than McDonald’s restaurants” and “97% of the American population has access to a public library” (Rothbeauer 135). These are fantastic numbers because they show the availability of resources to students. It should be relatively easy for students to find literature that they want to read, whether it is YA or not.

Every place will naturally keep its selection of YA books in different places, and this can be confusing for anyone unfamiliar with that particular location. Historically, the YA section used to be somewhere in the children’s section of the bookstore or library. It wasn’t until around 2000 that this started to change (Yampbell 352). The problem with keeping the YA books in the children’s section is

“teens do not even want to be seen in the children’s area of a bookstore” (Yampbell 351). From a marketing standpoint, this makes it difficult to sell books targeted to teens if they refuse to go where the books are being displayed. This change means that, “the new YA section is still adjacent to the Children’s Literature, but is outside the area for younger children” (Yampbell 352). Interestingly, Zdilla notes, “Publishers also encouraged bookstores to stock YAL in adult literature” because “YAL books would have a better chance of being picked up by more people if they were in both sections [adult and YA] of bookstores” (197). It would seem that there is no defined location for YA because, as previously mentioned, it is a transitional phase of books. This makes it marketable for younger and older readers, since adults are reading them too. One crossover example would be the *Twilight* novels, which “turned a lot of already avid adult readers on to the young adult genre, essentially doubling the potential audience for many of the books” (“Waiting”). It becomes nearly impossible, then, for two places to have the books housed in exactly the same place.

In order for readers to even have an interest in these books, something has to catch their attention. Zdilla comments that teens “felt that people should be encouraged to read what interested them, no matter how the books are categorized in a library or bookstore” (200). There needs to be some way to catch a young reader’s attention. Book covers are one way because they are “becoming more abstract, sensational, unusual, and eye-catching to allure one of the most elusive audiences—teenage readers” (Yampbell 348). The saying goes that we are not supposed to judge books by their covers, but that is usually the first interaction we

have with the book. Nilsen notes, “one-third of the students said that browsing in a library was one of the ways they gathered reading ideas” (324). What this means is that students do not always know what they are looking for in a book. Displays are an excellent way of presenting a few related books for readers to see. Displays show that “someone thought these books were good enough to deserve special attention” (324). Displays are only one way of catching a teen’s attention and drawing them into a part of the library or bookstore they may have originally missed.

### **Searching for YA**

But how good are these selections? Even with the prevalence of libraries and other booksellers, just how easy is it for teens to find what they are looking for? I wanted to see for myself where YA books were located in a number of stores and libraries in Fort Wayne, Indiana. I also looked at the location of the sites, selection of books available, and accessibility for teens. I picked Fort Wayne because of its size and location. Located in the northeast portion of the state, Fort Wayne is the second largest city in Indiana, covering 110.63 square miles and with an estimated 2012 population of 254,555. Less than 18% of this population falls into YA age group<sup>1</sup> (“Fort Wayne”).

I engaged in this study to better understand what kinds of books were available and marketed to teens and how accessible the books were. My search focused on places that I thought teens would have easy access to and were likely to look for books. I looked not only for the location within the store or library, but also

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<sup>1</sup> I calculated this number based on the percentage of persons under the age of 18 (26.4%) and subtracted this from the percentage of persons under the age of 5 (7.6%) as reported by the 2010 Census. My percentage, therefore, represents children ages 5-18, which is slightly too large of an age range for YA.

what selection was available and how it was presented to readers. I did not look at Internet sites because I was more interested in what teens could actually encounter in a store or library environment.

## Findings

I visited nine places in total: three libraries, three book stores, and three large retailers. In the sections that follow, I discuss the location of young adult texts within each place, the overall “young adult space” in each place, and the selection of books available.

### Libraries

All three of the libraries I visited are part of the Allen County Public Library (ACPL) system, which has a total of 14 libraries. The library system was established in 1895 in City Hall with 3,606 books (“Welcome”). Circulation for 2013 is up to 5.3 million from January to June, greater than the 4.6 million for the same time period in 2012. Because there are now so many digital



Figure 1

resources, patrons who come through the door are now down from 2.1 million to 2 million for the first half of 2013 as compared to the first half of 2012 (Sade). Figure 1 shows the location of these libraries in the city. From left to right, the three libraries I visited were the Allen County Main Library, located in the heart of downtown Fort Wayne; the Georgetown Branch on the northeast side of the city;

and the New Haven branch, which is to the east of Fort Wayne and outside of the city limits.

When I went into each library, I first had to discover where the YA section was housed. For most places, it was located almost as far away from the front doors as it could possibly be. There was a definite feeling that this section was being separated from the rest of the books. The libraries I visited were particularly guilty of this.

<b>Library Name</b>	<b>YA Section Placement at Site</b>	<b>Located Near</b>
Allen County Main Library	2 <sup>nd</sup> floor, far right corner in its own room	General reference, media center
New Haven Branch	Back left corner (mostly hidden from front doors)	General reference, computer bank
Georgetown Branch	Back, toward the right in its own room	Computers, paperback novels

Each place varied greatly on the amount of displays and signs alerting patrons to the YA or book section. The Main Library was the only library that had a sign posted over the doorway leading to their YA section. Georgetown relied on displays in the center of its space to entice readers in while the New Haven branch's section could only be found by stumbling upon it because there were no signs or displays leading up to it. To its credit, the New Haven branch did have a number of displays inside the section, but none leading up to it.



## *Main Library*

Each individual library, even though they are a part of the same library system, had very different sections. The Main Library had, by far, the largest selection of books for any of the nine places I visited.

The Main Library had shelves along the wall in a short hallway as I walked into the room advertising new releases, paranormal romances, and many others with their books faced out (Figure 2). The YA room itself is larger than the media room, with most of the space going to tables and open space for teens to enjoy. The bookshelves are crammed together in one area of the room, but the shelving area was quite long (Figure 3). Each shelf is three feet long, making a single aisle at least 39 feet long, with the wooden stands on the ends. There

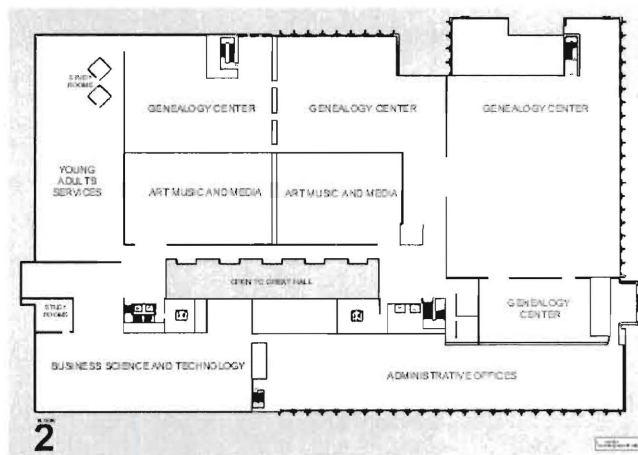


Figure 2



Figure 3

was little room in the aisles to maneuver or crouch to look at books on the bottom shelf. Four rows of shelves were used for fiction books, while the remaining four shelves held nonfiction texts, SAT and ACT prep, and audio books.

Even though there was little space allotted to the books, it still felt inviting and easy to search for books. The selection was wide, even with duplicates of most books on the shelves. I found it easy to scan the shelves for titles without being disturbed by the people talking at the nearby tables. My impression was that the Main Library made books accessible to teenagers and gave them an open and inviting place to spend time with friends. I call it inviting because of the large amount of space for teens to be social. The service desk in this room allows teens to borrow games as well as books. This aspect impressed me, even if I found the aisles of books to be cramped.

#### *Georgetown Branch*

The Georgetown Branch library also had a separate room for YA books that was not well marked, though the display just outside the room was helpful to guiding me to the right place. Georgetown collected a number of popular dystopian and science fiction titles just outside the



Figure 4

section to draw readers in. Once inside the room, this separation from the rest of the library felt like an advantage rather than a disadvantage. The bookshelves lined every wall, making the rectangular room feel circular. There are tall windows that allow in vast amounts of sunlight as well as a couple inviting armchairs scattered through the small room and a small table to work at near a corner. Figure 4 shows what one of these window shelves looks like.

Upon entering the room, the first shelves a teenager would find would be the fiction novels in alphabetical order by author's last name. Some popular authors had been pulled from the shelves and placed on display in the middle of the room with other popular authors. When this happened, there was a helpful sign taped to the shelf telling readers that authors like Sarah Dessen and John Green could be found in the center of the room. Popular series, like *Divergent* and *Matched*, were also kept in the middle display.

The Georgetown Branch had the most visible and accessible selection of graphic novels I found in the libraries I visited. It was easy to stumble upon it as I worked my way around the room. The newest manga titles were kept underneath one of the windows, which could be found at the end of the YA fiction section and near the audio books. The graphic novels and manga were on a shelf next to the small nonfiction section and test prep books.

Incidentally, I found this location to be one of the most welcoming sites I visited. There was a corkboard just inside the room with upcoming library and community events posted that may interest teens. It was easy to navigate and was clearly organized. I did not struggle to locate anything in this room, since everything was laid out logically.

### *New Haven Branch*

The New Haven Branch was one of my hardest subjects to study, and one of the most fascinating. I visited this library at least three times over the course of my study and found it vastly different upon every visit. It was clear that the section was undergoing an overhaul to bring in new readers.

Through every visit, the YA section has been housed in the back left corner of the library and virtually impossible to see from the front doors. There is also no straight path to the section from the doors, as patrons must weave past CDs and movies, computers, and paperback novels to reach the section. The library is small, yet filled with books and media in nearly every available space.



Figure 5

On my first visit to the New Haven Branch, the YA section was made up of five rows of shelves, each being twelve feet long. Only one was filled with nonfiction texts, while the others were fiction and audio books. Figure 5 shows one of the fiction shelves. There was a small wooden rack within the section as well that housed classics and paperback series books. My second visit was near the beginning of their overhaul, which added displays to this wooden rack. These displays asked for

reader input on what they would like to see added to the section and had half of a rack devoted to a display titled "Dress Envy." This particular display showcased roughly a dozen books with covers showing beautiful girls in enormous ball gowns from all subgenres. Audio books were moved out of the section. This newly opened shelf space was taken over by new books, and the rest of the section expanded to fill in the rest of the space. The third visit revealed that different genres like Christian

Fiction, Mystery, and Paranormal were pulled from the rest of the fiction and placed on different shelves.

The selection at New Haven is slightly smaller than that of the Georgetown Branch. There are few duplicate titles on these shelves, though they do have a wide well stocked collection of new titles, fiction and nonfiction. They use this space to face out six or seven new books. A few that I noted were *This Is What Happy Looks Like* by Jennifer E. Smith, *Pulse* by Patrick Carman, *Through the Zombie Glass* by Gena Showalter, and *The Rules* by Stacey Kade.

It is worth mentioning that on my second visit, one of their displays asked for teen input on the section. There was a questionnaire for teens to fill out that asked their first name, grade level, and school along with what they liked to read, what they wanted to see in the section, and what they were tired of seeing in the section. This was the only indication I saw at any of my sites that asked for input from any of their patrons.

On the whole, the libraries tried to house a wide selection of titles rather than just bestsellers. They created a comfortable and inviting environment for teenagers to socialize and look for books. There is a fine balance between these two goals, with one usually slightly edging out the other. This was exemplified by the Main Library squeezing the shelves together to make room for tables and open space, or by Georgetown's fewer seating possibilities but organized and open bookshelves.



## Large Retailers

Some of the largest retailers in Fort Wayne include Wal-Mart and Target.

There are three Target locations and five Wal-Mart locations with Fort Wayne

addresses. This made these stores my most obvious choices for exploration. It is worth noting that most of the Wal-Mart locations are on the north side of Fort Wayne and close to I-469. All three of the Target locations are near shopping centers. Figure 6 shows their



Figure 6

locations in Ft. Wayne, with the one on the right being Wal-Mart.

In general, books did not appear to be a priority at any of the large retailers.

While I figured this would likely be the case, as large retailers seldom have any product they specialize in housing, it was disappointing to see it in person.

Retailer Name	YA Section Placement at Site	Located Near
Target (Stellhorn Rd.)	Back center of the store, between romance novels and children's books	Electronics, men's clothing
Target (Coldwater Rd.)	Back center of the store, between romance novels and children's books	Electronics, men's clothing
Wal-Mart (Maysville Rd.)	Front far left, next to children's books and across from bestsellers	Gardening supplies, party supplies

The retailers seemed to mostly rely on people simply walking past the section as a way to find the books. There were no signs pointing shoppers toward the book sections. The only indications that there were books in this area were the signs either hanging from the ceiling over the aisle (as was the case at Wal-Mart) or attached to the top of the shelf (as it was at Target) and a small display on the end of the aisles to entice shoppers. This was very similar to how these retailers stocked and labeled most items in their stores.

### *Target*

Both of the Target stores I visited were identical in nearly every aspect of their selection and presentation of the book section. Since this is the case, I will discuss them together. Target housed their books along the back of the store, near the center of the back of the building. To the left, they housed men's clothing. To the right, there were electronics in the form of DVDs, CDs, and cameras. Across the main aisle, there were aisles of children's toys.

The book section itself was quite small, being made up of three small aisles to browse and a few shelves on the back wall. This meant that the YA section was given only a limited amount of space. It had one half of an aisle, meaning it was only on the right hand side when I entered the aisle. To the left in the same aisle, there were also romance and



Figure 7

suspense/thriller novels. Over the top of the YA section, it was possible to view the brightly colored children's books. It was easy to distinguish the YA section from the children's books because the colors of the signs over the sections were different. The children's signs were green while the YA signs were purple, the same color as the rest of the book section (Figure 7).

Nearly every book was faced outward and had a sticker on the cover to show it was 20% off the listed price. Fiction books took up most of the shelf space, giving nonfiction books only the lowest row in the aisle. Many of the books at the beginning of the aisle are books that have been turned into movies (*Divergent*, *Beautiful Creatures* by Kami Garcia and Margaret Stohl, and *I Am Number Four* by Pittacus Lore). The rest of the fiction books were those that were popular bestsellers. These included *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak, *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* by Ransom Riggs, *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher, and *Clockwork Angel* by Cassandra Clare. The nonfiction books were mostly unofficial biographies of celebrities like Justin Bieber, Lauren Conrad, and One Direction.

One aisle over was the shelf for bestsellers regardless of genre. I counted only three titles that could be considered YA with the bestsellers. Two of those titles are questionably YA, at that (*Life of Pi* by Yann Martel and *Beautiful Disaster* by Jamie McGuire). The only bestseller that was purely YA was *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky, which was released on DVD shortly before I conducted my visit. It is worth noting that the Target at Glenbrook put YA books on their end display of "New Books". These three books were *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green and *Divergent* and *Insurgent* by Veronica Roth. I initially missed them on



this display because they are located a mere inch from the ground on the bottom shelf (Figure 8).



Figure 8

### *Wal-Mart*

I had a similar experience at Wal-Mart. The book section was in the far left of the store, yet in the front rather than the back. It was placed only an aisle away from the gardening supplies and next to party

supplies. There was a small end display of

Christian Fiction to bring readers in.

The YA books are the first books I saw upon entering the aisle from the main aisle. They are on the right-hand side with the vast majority of titles faced outward. Fiction titles made up the top four rows of shelves and nonfiction and comics took the bottom two. Less well-known books lined these shelves, some examples being *Darkest Minds* by Alexandra Bracken, *Out of the Easy* by Ruta Sepetys, *I Funny* by James Patterson, and *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* by Jeff Kinney. There were a few bestsellers mixed in as well, but most bestsellers were housed across the aisle with the other bestsellers, regardless of genre. The bottom two shelves were sparser than the shelves above. These lowest shelves contained books from LEGO that appeared to be like comic books and a photo biography of One Direction, among a few other books.

These shelves were directly next to the children's books. It was almost shocking to see so many books with dark covers directly next to half a dozen bright pink Disney princess books (Figure 9). In some instances, these books were so close to the YA section they were touching.



Figure 9

Another interesting area to study was the bestsellers shelf directly across from the YA books. This area was home to the Hunger Games series by Suzanne Collins and the Mortal Instruments series by Cassandra Clare, to list a couple examples. Nearly every

YA book or series on this side was made into a movie. A little further from the end of the aisle, I found a few more YA books that were not part of a movie franchise. These books belonged to the Chronicles of Nick series by Sherrilyn Kenyon. There seemed to be little reason to where each book series was placed as long as the series were left together. This meant that Kenyon's books were placed next to books about *Duck Dynasty* rather than other YA books.

It was expected that books would not be heavily featured in any of these retailers, but I had expected them to have more of a selection because of the popularity of books, now that they are constantly being turned into movies. While

Wal-Mart had a smaller amount of space, they had the most diverse selection of the retailers because it was not solely about the bestsellers. They included some titles I had never heard of before, most of those being middle grade books like *I Funny*.

## Bookstores

Bookstores are harder to find in Fort Wayne than I expected. The giants in the city are Barnes & Noble, which has two locations inside two different malls. The other bookstore I chose to look at is Half Price Books, a store that specializes in selling used books, movies, and CDs at a fraction of their original price. Figure 10 shows the locations of these stores, though the Barnes & Noble at



Figure 10

Glenbrook and Half Price Books overlap. Each of these locations was situated in high traffic parts of the city.

Bookstore Name	YA Section Placement at Site	Located Near
Barnes & Noble (Glenbrook)	Center of intersection between doors forming an L shape	Customer service, games, electronics
Barnes & Noble (Jefferson Pointe)	Center point between front and back doors, along a wall	Customer service, electronics, games
Half-Price Books (Coliseum Blvd.)	Near back left corner of the store	Children's books, auto repair books, CDs

These bookstores had a way of creatively placing YA books out of the way while trying to draw readers toward that section with displays. All of the stores utilized the space on the end of aisles as display locations. However, not every place had aisle displays. Both of the Barnes & Noble locations had numerous displays along the center aisles of the stores to entice readers toward the YA section. These displays were typically genre-specific. Some of the genres given this space were “Survival Stories,” “New in Action & Adventure,” and “Summer Reads.” The

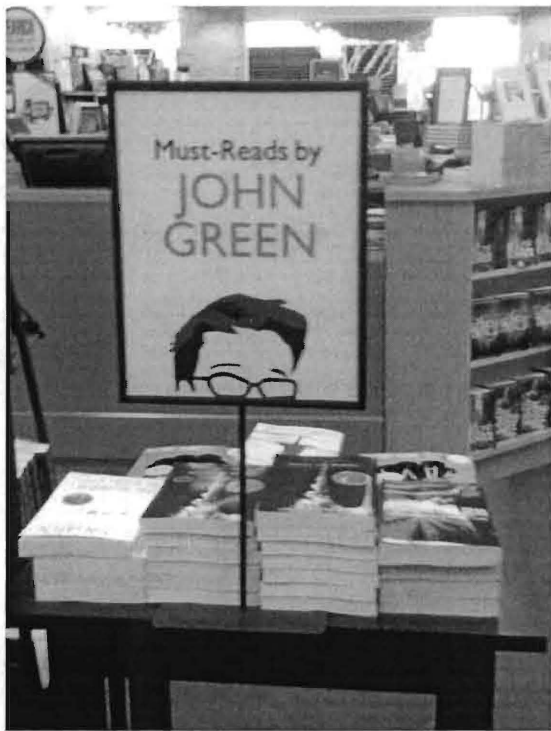


Figure 11

“Summer Reads” display contained mostly love stories that take place over the summer. These were the same at both Barnes & Noble stores. At the Glenbrook location, there was also an author-specific display for John Green (Figure 11). Half Price books contained only two displays I noticed that had YA books, the first merely being the bestsellers display. *The Fault in*

*Our Stars* was the only YA book I noted

being placed here. There was another display in the middle of the YA section that did not seem to a theme other than popular books.

#### *Glenbrook Barnes & Noble*

The Barnes & Noble at Glenbrook Mall had an interesting arrangement for the store. There are two doors that led into the store, one from outside and one from the inside of the mall. This creates an L shape for the store. The YA section is

very near the intersection of these two aisles leading into the store. It is right next to the customer service desk, board games, and media center.

The Glenbrook location had a diverse but smaller than expected selection. There are three tables in front of the section grouped mostly by popularity or topic. On each table, I found almost two dozen different titles staring back at me. The shelves are full of books faced outward with a variety of titles from the bestselling *What Happened to Goodbye* by Sarah Dessen to newly released *Thousand Words* by Jennifer Brown. After this initial aisle of popular titles, books are sorted by their subgenres and fewer books are faced outward as the shelves become more crowded. These books were given the sign “Teen Fiction” and included some titles such as *The Hate List* by Jennifer Brown, *Perfect Chemistry* by Simone Elkeles, and *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. The final row of shelves contained very few titles that were faced out.

I returned to this location a couple of months after my initial observation and found that the section had been moved. It was disorienting because I did not know where to look, since the displays did not seem to lead to the section’s old location. The YA section had been moved to a place immediately outside of the children’s section. Two steps were all that separated YA nonfiction from picture books. The section no longer had its aisle displays about different genres or authors. All of the YA books were condensed to two aisles. There were still end displays on the ends of the aisles, but it was clear that less space had been given to them than they had previously had.

## *Jefferson Pointe Barnes & Noble*

The Barnes & Noble at Jefferson Pointe has long been one of my favorite bookstores to visit. This location also has an interesting layout. There are two doors into the store from opposite ends of the building. The store is set up as a straight line, where visitors could walk from one door to the other and still manage to view the entire store. (In fact, many visitors to this open-air shopping center will use this store as their shortcut from the interior to the exterior parking lot in cold weather.) It receives a lot of traffic, as moviegoers from the nearby theater will spend time here before their movie starts.

The YA section is located near the center of the store and, once again, next to the customer service desk, media center, and board games. It is easily identifiable by the green signs that are posted on the wall above the section. This is the only section of the store that exists on a wall, making it unique and noticeable. Two large tables leading up to this wall are always loaded with books. In the middle of the summer, both of these tables were brimming with classic novels. They had everything from paperback editions of *Grapes of Wrath* to hardback collections of Edgar Allan Poe's works. Once summer is over, one of these tables usually returns to YA books.

The wall is covered with YA books, mostly in the fantasy, adventure and nonfiction genres. Figure 12 shows a portion of this wall. There are a number of covers that are faced outward, but the shelves are full of books that are placed with only their spines visible. The section extends along this wall down toward the media center. At this point, the wall gives way to a four-foot tall wooden shelving



unit that runs along the right side of the perimeter of the media center. This area holds the newest books in the section.

This section contains many end displays on the end of nearby aisles. One of



Figure 12

these displays was for author Richelle Mead, who had recently released a new book. I found it odd that one of the most prominently placed books on this display was written by Jodi Meadows, not Mead.

For as much as I like this section, I have found one flaw with its design. At my height of five feet six inches, I find it incredibly hard to grab a book off of the

top shelf along the wall. I have resorted

to standing on my toes, jumping, and waving madly at the books in an effort to get just enough of a finger on it to knock it off. There are no step stools in the vicinity to allow teenagers the option of getting the books themselves if they happen to be too short to reach them. It is possible that this is a deterrent for some readers because they do not want to ask for help.

### *Half Price Books*

The last bookstore I visited is Half Price Books. It is located on Coliseum Boulevard, one of the busiest shopping areas in the city. It is situated in its own

small shopping plaza between another shopping plaza and Glenbrook Mall. During the holiday months, ads for this store are always on the radio.

When I entered the store, I found it fairly easy to spot the YA section. Signs hang from the ceiling over each of their section, making it easy to quickly locate every section in the store. The YA books were in the back left corner of the store, sandwiched between the auto repair books and the children’s books. Across the



Figure 13

aisle were CDs situated in a wooden rack.

The first of the three small YA aisles shared the space with auto repair books. The space between these vastly different genres was decorated with license plates. Each shelf was helpfully labeled with the genre it was to hold. The first few shelves were reserved for teen paperbacks with a sign placed underneath to say that all paperbacks are half off of the publisher’s price. Next came teen Christian fiction, followed by

teen fiction in alphabetical order by author’s last name (Figure 13). This took up the rest of the section.

While not much space in the store was allocated for YA books, very few books were faced outward on the shelves. This meant more books could be held in less space. Each book had a sticker on the front cover explicitly stating its price, as



hardbacks or popular books were priced differently than paperbacks. For many of the titles, there was more than one copy on the shelves. The Marked series by P.C. and Kristen Cast averaged three books for each title in the series.

### **Analysis**

Between each of these places, I found a number of similarities. One of the most startling and widespread similarities was that the YA section was almost always located in the back of the site. This was the case whether the location was a Wal-Mart or a library. It was difficult to classify the Barnes & Noble locations in this way, but I also feel that they are guilty of this, even though the YA section is located in the center of their store. It is still the farthest point from any doors into the store.

It was my impression that these sections were purposefully placed out of the way. They were nowhere near the newest books or the big-ticket items in stores. I believe this is because there are still too many who view YA books as a form of children's literature, as Yampbell has noted. I saw this represented in many places. Wal-Mart, for example, did not have any visible division between the YA and children's books. Bookstores still had the two sections within a few steps of each other. Only the libraries placed any distance between the two sections. By viewing it this way, many retailers devalue it as inferior to adult books. YA books are probably not a store or library's most popular item anyway, but putting it in the back of the store makes it less likely that teens will find it. In some locations I was less familiar with, I searched the site for five or ten minutes before I found it. This could be much longer than teens are willing to search, especially if they are only casual readers. I was very troubled by this trend.

However, I think these places also try to draw teens toward the YA books, too. I began paying attention to what was nearby when I was in these sections. In almost every store location (the exception being Wal-Mart), it seemed that the YA section was located near electronics of some sort. The specifics varied by location. Target had their section located within feet of videos and CDs. The Barnes & Noble locations almost forced me to walk through the YA section to enter their electronics section. Even Half-Price Books had moved their movie and CD collections closer to the YA section, and their used CDs were directly across from the YA books. This is important because it shows a conscious effort from retailers to create a connection between electronics, which teens are typically associated with, and YA books.

Libraries were an exception to this electronics phenomenon. The Main Library did have the media center just one section over from the YA books, but this was the only library that did so. The New Haven branch had all of the electronics near the front of the library within six feet of the circulation desk. The Georgetown branch also kept theirs near the circulation desk, though theirs were located in the computer bank area.

It was an interesting discovery to find electronics always so near the YA section. It seemed to be a strategic move on the part of the stores as a way to get casual teen readers near the book section. From there, the stores relied on their displays and signs to guide teens into the YA books. This may be the strategy employed by the Main Library as well, even though they are not selling books in the same sense that stores are.

The selection of books I encountered was slightly different from what Nilsen and Koss and Teale found. With a few exceptions, roughly half of the books I encountered were realistic fiction, as both studies indicated. However, there were far more fantasy and science fiction novels in my locations than they found. Every library location had displays for at least one of those categories. Barnes & Noble also focused much of their attention on those two subgenres. Large retailers only focused on the most popular books, regardless of genre. This meant that most of the books they had were dystopian or paranormal fantasy with very few realistic fiction novels on the shelves. Because of its reliance on used books, Half Price Books did not completely fit with this model, but they did have many paranormal and fantasy titles. In all places, I saw very few historical novels that were purely historical, which Nilsen found to be the second most popular genre. Many historical books I found were historical fantasies or a hybrid of historical and another genre.

I also studied the size of each section I saw. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the bookstores largely had the widest collection, but the libraries had the bigger selection. This means the Barnes & Noble stores had more books than some of the libraries, but the variety was not as diverse as those of the libraries or of Half Price Books. Bookstores mostly only have the newest and most popular books on their shelves. The libraries contained titles that were older (some stamped as being older than myself). I would go to these locations if I were hoping to find a book I had never heard of, or one that had not made it to the top of the bestsellers list.

I was excited by the number of places that offered discounts or lower prices for their books. Teenagers in general have little money they can budget for books.

In 2010, teens with summer jobs in the food-service and accommodation industry averaged \$559 per month in income (Freeman). Discounted prices, like those at Target or Half Price Books, allow teenagers to save money and still buy a few books. Barnes & Noble offers discounts and coupons as well through their website, though they are typically limited in when they can be used.

### **Conclusions**

It is of utmost importance that people, not just teens, can be reintroduced to the joys of reading. Most of the attention is focused on children and teenagers because of standardized test scores in school. When reading scores drop, the usual reaction is to force students to read more books in school. This is the wrong approach for a number of reasons, the biggest of which being that reading then becomes a chore to students because they have no choice in what they get to read, as Miller showed with her book. Reward systems are only a quick fix because students—and few of them, at that—will work to get the reward and then stop. Fewer still will continue to read after the reward has been received because they no longer have to keep reading.

This shows the importance of choice to teens, not only with what books they choose to read, but where they can find them. The location itself can be viewed as inaccessible to teens if it is too far away for them to walk or drive. Similarly, if books are put too far away or are otherwise inaccessible to teens, there is a good chance they will not find a book that draws them in. As it is, most students read because it is a school requirement, not because they enjoy it or think there is any enjoyment to be had. If we as teachers, parents, librarians, and other adult role models can show

teenagers just how many books are available to them, then we should be able to show teens what reading a good story can do for them.

While each location had its merits, it is my belief that libraries are the ideal place for teenagers to go when looking for reading material because of the diversity of texts. They are located in nearly every community, especially in Fort Wayne. With fourteen branches in the system, it is far easier to find a library than a bookstore. Libraries do not only house the newest titles; they also have books on the shelves that are over ten or even fifteen years old. Libraries, especially one as affluent as the Allen County system, have the resources to buy nearly any book they are requested to buy. They also loan books between libraries when patrons put them on hold. Teens do not have to rely solely on what the library nearest to them has, but what the system has. This helps make libraries a great place for teenagers to explore new genres and authors without spending money on books they are not sure they will like.

It is my recommendation that parents, teachers, and adult role models to make high interest books available to young adult readers whenever possible. One way to do this is to take teenagers to the library when possible. This is more difficult for teachers, but I think teachers can bring the library to students. Teachers can bring in items they have checked out from the library or invite a librarian to talk to the class about what the library has to offer. Teens should be encouraged to read what they want to, even if it does not fit the parent's, teacher's, or role model's idea of what they should be reading. It is my belief that teenagers need exposure to YA books in order to understand that they are not the only one going through a tough

time. These books are targeted specifically to them with main characters their age. Teenagers should not be forced to read these, but they should have them available to them if they would like to explore these themes, genres, and worlds on their own. Libraries are great places for this exploration to happen. With time and freedom, teenagers may become readers.

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